

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1C

WASHINGTON TIMES
7 February 1986

TELEVISION /

Sue Mullin

TV viewers under 'Siege' Sunday night

Round two in the TV sweeps gets under way Sunday night with a three-way battle of new movies for the tube.

ABC will try to bring viewers into its tent with "Harem." It's a sleaze extravaganza about a young American woman who is kidnapped and held captive in a "mysterious world where pleasure is an art, love is a duty and passion is a weapon." It stars Art Malik, Sarah Miles, Yaphet Kotto, Nancy Travis, Ava Gardner and Omar Sharif. Mr. Sharif is the sultan. Last week he was hanging out with Peter the Great on NBC as Prince Feodor Romodanovsky.

Meantime over at CBS it's "Child's Cry," another in the "Something About Amelia" mold, except this time the sexually abused child is a 6-year-old. Lindsay Wagner, once the Bionic Woman, has become insufferably human. She is now making a career of portraying noble, nurturing women. In the short-lived "Jesse" series a couple of years ago, she was a shrink for a police department. In "Cry," she's a social worker. There's nothing wrong with her performance here. Nor is there anything wrong with sweet-faced Taliesin Jaffe as the boy and Peter Coyote as his father. It's just that we've seen it all before.

But something we haven't seen before holds forth on NBC Sunday night. Called "Under Siege," it's a frightening movie about terrorist attacks on our own doorstep. An Army base outside Washington is the first target, but ultimately even the Capitol is blown up. Denied permission to film those sequences at the U.S. Capitol, the state capitol building in Little Rock, Ark., was used. It's a scaled-down model of the Capitol and the bombing sequence is so horrifically real looking, it will be difficult to drive by the Capitol on Monday morning without thinking about it.

With as much gore as a John Carpenter film — passenger planes, restaurants and shopping malls filled with people are bombed — "Under Siege" is not suitable for children. In fact, it is only for those adults with a strong stomach.

A superb cast is headed by Peter Strauss as the level-headed FBI director. Hal Holbrook portrays a current president for a change. E.G. Marshall is the secretary of state and Fritz Weaver is the CIA chief. Paul Winfield portrays the secretary of defense.

There is just one problem with "Under Siege," but it is a big one. The three-hour movie is based on an investigative series on terrorism which ran in The Washington Post. In fact, one of the series' writers, Bob Woodward of Watergate fame, co-wrote the teleplay. There is something disconcerting about journalists involving themselves in fiction in this fashion.

Because it is based so much on actual terrorist activities, ter-

Passenger planes, restaurants and shopping malls filled with people are bombed.

rorists and even political personages — Mr. Woodward has said much of the dialogue given to the secretary of state character, for example, was excerpted from speeches by Secretary of State George Shultz — the work seems exploitative. It takes our worst fears about terrorists and gives those fears a patina of credibility. It's as if a group of physicists had penned "The Day After" teleplay or the KGB were to write scenarios for the ABC's planned film about a Soviet take-over, "Amerika."

If the weekend fare of "Harem" and scare'em is not your idea of fun or gleaned information, there are alternatives. Those interested in real world defense issues will want to turn at 8:30 Sunday night to WHMM-32 for "America's Black Forum." Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger is interviewed on a wide range of topics by Julian Bond on the program: Mr. Weinberger discusses defense spending vs. domestic spending; "hot spots" around the world, including Angola and South Africa; the Strategic Defense Initiative; U.S.-Soviet relations; nuclear weapons, and minorities in the services.